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A Renaissance for Children?

Introduction

This essay begins to map the conceptual terrain occupied by my current research project, in which I set out to document an early modern archive of literate childhoods, and to reflect on the meanings of the texts contained therein for the study of both childhood and the textual culture of the English Renaissance.¹ By identifying, editing and analyzing a corpus of writings in English produced by children from the mid-sixteenth to late-seventeenth centuries, I aim to make a new contribution to the efforts of archival recovery and canon-transformation that have reshaped Renaissance studies in recent decades. Such work does not merely change the content of what we know about the past, but also demands that we think about it differently, and the project thus has a second key goal: to counter the habit, still prominent in much historical and literary work on childhood, of treating children primarily as the objects of adults' material and psychic investments or as tropes for adult cultural concerns. I seek instead to position children in literary cultures as the subjects of their own writing. By doing so, I aim to show that a re-examination of Renaissance literary history informed by a child-centred perspective on the history of childhood sheds new light on each of these fields.

In the process of considering which methodologies and critical approaches would best serve my investigation of Renaissance childhoods, I returned to reflect on some of the work that has influenced my similar efforts as a feminist scholar of early modern literary culture over the past two decades. In particular, I have been re-inspired by feminist historian Joan Kelly's agenda-changing decision to take a fresh look at the period 'from the vantage point of women'. With the publication of her essay 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?', Joan Kelly transformed knowledge both about women and about the Renaissance by insisting that both the observer's angle of view and the visibility of the object studied were of critical

¹ Some material from the introduction to this essay, and the section on Rachael Fane, appear under the title of 'Did Children have a Renaissance?' in a Forum exploring the continuing significance of Kelly's work for Renaissance studies and women's studies in *Early Modern Women Journal*, EMWJ 8, 2013, pp. 261-74. I am grateful to the editors for allowing me to use this material here.

importance.² She paid the women of the European Renaissance elite a quality and quantity of attention that they had previously been denied, considering them not merely as objects of scholarship but as subjects of culture. Kelly's formulation of a question which challenges conceptualisation and periodisation has taken on an intellectual life of its own: scholars have asked whether a variety of cultural phenomena enjoyed a Renaissance, while posing the question 'Did women have an Enlightenment?' gave rise to Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott's magisterial study of *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*.³ So my decision to re-engage with her work now is not merely a product of my own intellectual trajectory, and indeed her approach arguably has particular resonance for work on children. Kelly herself acknowledged the complicity between feminist and child-centered critical perspectives on culture, declaring that "women will make the world concern itself with children,"⁴ and Renaissance and early modern studies as a field is increasingly taking stock of the implications of the "embeddedness of women and children within *each other's* lives"⁵. The potential for a productive alliance between the agendas of feminist scholarship, and work on children and childhood is registered in powerfully suggestive work by Claudia Castaneda which invites us to think through what is at stake culturally and analytically when we think of women and children together and separately, in their difference, their connections, and in terms particularly of their variegated relations to power and autonomy.⁶ A number of recent and forthcoming studies of early modern culture respond implicitly to Castaneda's invitation, and the present project aims to further this line of inquiry.⁷

² Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1977, pp. 137-64.

³ Carol Thomas Neely, 'Recent Work in Renaissance Studies: Psychology: Did Madness Have a Renaissance?' *Renaissance Quarterly* 44:4, 1991, pp. 776-791; Brian P. Copenhaver, Did Science Have a Renaissance? *Isis*, 83:3, 1992, pp. 387-407; Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott, eds, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

⁴ Joan Kelly, unpublished *Cancer Journal* (1982), quoted in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. xv.

⁵ Ann Oakley, 'Women and Children First and Last: Parallels and Differences between Women's and Children's Studies', in Berry Mayall, ed., *Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced* London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 13-32 (esp. p. 19), emphasis original.

⁶ Claudia Castaneda, *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

⁷ See Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, eds, *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011; Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013; Deanne Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2014.

By taking the influential account of the Renaissance as a time of empowerment and the flourishing of human potential (for men at any rate) as her point of departure and then critiquing its omissions and exclusions, Joan Kelly simultaneously acknowledged and challenged the enduring power of the historical progress narrative that saw the Renaissance as a staging point along the road to modernity. Her work prompted a generation of scholars to consider whether – as Merry Wiesner would later put it – it is still meaningful to celebrate a period as a golden age, a Renaissance, if it had few positive, or actively negative, effects on women.⁸ This essay takes up the important questions about periodization, politics and methodology raised by Kelly, and asks whether and how they have the potential to have as transformative an impact on the study of childhood as they did for women’s history. Arguably, they have particular resonance for the study of children and childhood because the nostalgic construction of childhood itself as a golden age within the lifespan of the individual is a powerful narrative of Western selfhood. In turn, this narrative has come to serve as a trope for the celebration of an idealized past: for a number of writers in the period with which we are concerned, Leah Marcus argues, “childhood was a rich and complex symbol . . . for a whole range of values associated with an England of the past and rapidly disappearing . . . in the divided England of their own time.”⁹ This trope is counterposed, however, by another cultural narrative of considerable power in Western modernity in which, as Susanne Greenhalgh notes, childhood is viewed as a state “imbued with the characteristics of progress, futurity, and thus modernity itself.”¹⁰ Childhood – experienced, remembered, and represented – provides us with powerful and evocative tropes and structures for telling stories of progress. Consequently, the history of childhood can readily be assimilated to a progressive understanding of historical change and come to be marked by a curious complicity with other progressive historical narratives.

Just such a narrative is arguably the single most influential story in the history of childhood: namely, the argument of Philippe Ariès’ *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962) that it is precisely because we learned to love our children during the

⁸ Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5.

⁹ Leah S. Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-century Literature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 41.

¹⁰ Susanne Greenhalgh, “Introduction: Reinventing Shakespearean Childhoods” in Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert Shaughnessy, eds., *Shakespeare and Childhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 117-36 esp. 119.

centuries of the Renaissance and Enlightenment that we became modern.¹¹ Yet, though childhood itself has often been retrospectively constructed as a golden age, an idealized time, the question of how an age treated its children is almost never on the agenda of scholarship beyond the specific field of the history of childhood. Moreover, in historical terms, the idea that children might ever be ‘liberat[ed]... from natural, social, or ideological constraints’ has only rarely and belatedly been raised – perhaps in the age of the Rousseauesque idealization of childhood as natural, though then only in limited ways; and again in the intellectual and cultural movements of the late twentieth-century that led to the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. And despite the immense and enduring influence of Ariès’ argument within the history of childhood, the question of children’s status and experience in early modern society has not figured significantly in the critiques and rethinking of the notion of the Renaissance that have shaped scholarly debate in recent decades.¹² The relative absence of children from these critical conversations is perhaps surprising, given the prominence of gender and women within them and the close proximity often ascribed in intellectual work – as in social arrangements – to women and children.

To ask whether children had a Renaissance is therefore both to challenge some unexamined agendas, and to cut across a powerful set of tropes and narratives about childhood with a different way of making sense of childhood in time: one which situates it not as a pure state of becoming, but in relation to complex historical processes, and which – at the same time as foregrounding, in its very nomenclature, progress and transformation – invites us to consider the possibility of a ‘dark ages’ of childhood experience. Kelly’s work on women transformed the study of the Renaissance by insisting that both the observer’s angle of view and the visibility of the object studied were of critical importance.¹³ If we now take children as the object of our scrutiny and also look at the Renaissance from the vantage point of children as cultural subjects and historical agents, what further transformations

¹¹ For an authoritative account of Ariès’ work on childhood and an overview of the subsequent debate, see Patrick Hutton, *Philippe Ariès and the Politics of French Cultural History* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004, especially Chapter 6, ‘Decades of Debate about *Centuries of Childhood*’, pp. 92– 112.

¹² Note the absence of childhood as a category of experience or analysis from such key works as *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers Chicago: Chicago University Press 1986; and Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

¹³ Kelly, *Women, History and Theory*, vii.

might be wrought? How might doing so change what we know and how we think about children and about the Renaissance?

In the present essay and in the larger project it foreshadows, I follow Joan Kelly's lead methodologically as well as conceptually by focusing on children as producers of culture and taking their texts as sources for both the experience and construction of childhood, just as Kelly used women's writings to make newly visible both their distinctive vantage point on the culture they inhabited and the ideological work that gender did in it. Primary sources that enable us to consider the experience and construction of childhood from the child's point of view as subject of his or her own life take two principal forms: writings produced by children themselves and those in which adults recollect their earlier childhoods. Neither kind of source provides unmediated and unproblematic access to the lived experience of childhood, of course: each is constructed in a process of dialogue with the textual and social expectations that shape the writing of lives. How, then, can studying texts written by children help us answer the question of whether they had a Renaissance? This essay proffers case studies drawing on two archives of Renaissance childhood in an attempt to answer this question. It juxtaposes the traces of a boy's engagement with literary culture with writings by a girl in order to explore how gender as a category of analysis needs to inform our thinking about the cultural specificities of childhood.

First, I introduce the corpus of forty or so occasional poems composed by William Paget, later fifth Baron Paget, in the 1580s, when he was aged between about 9 and 14. The poems are recorded (along with a set of very similar verses written a generation later by George Berkeley (eighth Baron Berkeley) in the literary miscellany kept over a period of decades by the man who tutored both of these boys: amateur poet, clergyman and domestic intellectual Henry Stanford.¹⁴ In writing these poems under his guidance, the boys put into practice some of the precepts of humanist pedagogic theory and compositional practice that are most closely associated with the idealization of the Renaissance as a time of educational

¹⁴ Henry Stanford's *Miscellany* MS Dd 5.75 [F], UL, Cambridge. The MS was edited by Steven May, *Henry Stanford's Anthology: An Edition of Cambridge University Library Manuscript Dd. 5.75*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968. The boys' poems have been previously discussed by L.G. Black, 'Some Renaissance Verse by Children', *Review of English Studies* new series vol. 24, no. 93, 1973, 1-16. For a critical analysis of some of the verse which complements the arguments of the present essay, see my 'Make me a poet, and I'll quickly be a man: masculinity, pedagogy and poetry in the English Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies* 2013, first published online 17 September 2012, doi: 10.1111/j.1477-4658.2012.00828.x.

renewal and cultural achievement. Studying their verse (in the present essay, to be precise, a subset of poems by William) thus allows us to ask to what extent and in what ways boys of the English aristocracy had a Renaissance. It also reveals some key aspects of the formation of elite masculinity through textual practice and social engagement with female addressees and readers. This issue is highlighted, in the poems I select for discussion here, by the boy poet's reflections on the qualities sought and fostered in an elite girl.

These issues resonate through the second case study, which examines a set of notebooks produced in the 1620s that document both Lady Rachael Fane's engagement between the ages of about 11 and 15 with pedagogic exercises, and the creative uses she made of what she learned.¹⁵ Rachael's education was overseen by her grandmother Lady Grace Mildmay, whose life-writings document her own mid-sixteenth century childhood and education.¹⁶ Over several generations, women in this family set themselves to generate and transmit knowledge and texts in a female intellectual lineage that was oriented towards core Renaissance values. Juxtaposing the textual traces of these two elite childhoods enables us to explore the interactions of gender, generation, and cultural production over the key period associated with the Renaissance in England.

I

Cambridge UL MS Dd.5.75 is a literary miscellany compiled over a period from 1581 to 1616 by Henry Stanford.¹⁷ It contains significant quantities of verse composed by two young aristocratic boys who came under Stanford's tutelage, William Paget and George Berkeley. The education which Henry Stanford provided to his pupils was designed to induct them into an established culture: to form them as future members of the male elite of English Renaissance society by moulding their intellectual and ethical development according to its values. Humanist pedagogic theory assumed that this could best be achieved by a process of imitation of the best models, just as the process of becoming a skilled poet involved the

¹⁵ Rachael Fane's MSS are in Maidstone Library, Kent: U269 F38/1/1-15, U269 F38/2, U269 F38/3, U269 F38/4, U269 F38/5.

¹⁶ For a biographical account and edited extracts from Grace Mildmay's copious MS writings, see Linda A. Pollock, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552-1620*. New York: St Martin's, 1995. An annotated transcript of her autobiography has been published: Randall Martin, 'The Autobiography of Grace, Lady Mildmay', *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 18:1, 1994, 33-81.

¹⁷ Henry Stanford's *Miscellany* MS Dd 5.75 [F], UL, Cambridge.

imitation of well-chosen precursors and the internalization of a complex set of literary conventions.¹⁸ The highly conventional, imitative and intertextual nature of the boys' poetry, illustrated in my readings below of a small selection of William's poems, enacts these pedagogic principles, as I have argued elsewhere.¹⁹

I focus here on two poems which William, writing near the beginning of his literary career in the early 1580s, addressed to other children – specifically, to young girls. In these poems, William not only performs the masculine social role in which he was being trained up, but also maps the expectations that shape the girlhood of young women of his class. Items 2 and 3 in Cambridge University Library MS Dd.5.75 are, like almost all the child-authored verse in this miscellany, poems offered as New Year gifts. Item 2 accompanies a material gift of a pair of gloves, while Item 3 is itself presented as a gift. For the English Renaissance elite, the exchange of New Year gifts was a long-established and highly valued custom. Sir Thomas More explained that such gifts were exchanged between friends as 'witnesses of their loue and frendsship' in a note attached to a gift to his sister of a translation of Pico della Mirandola (c. 1520), a transaction which aptly illustrates the way humanist educational and cultural practice understood the intellectual, social and affective to be interrelated.²⁰ William Paget was no Thomas More, but in offering his poetic gift to a young female member of the household, probably a cousin (and quite likely the same girl in each instance, although I have not so far been able to identify the addressee), he signals his recognition of the importance of the social and cultural performances that sustain not merely affective relationships, but also those of reciprocal obligation and social duty. In terms of the gendered dynamics of Renaissance culture, it is no accident that the examples of More and Paget both involve male writers offering textual gifts to female readers, and the two poems with which I am concerned here enact a particular version of this cultural formation.

Staging the male poetic subject's address to a female object, these poems constitute a youthful mimicry of the highly gendered affective structure of Petrarchan poetry, an

¹⁸ On the importance of literary imitation as an educational process, see T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944; on the Renaissance's investment in 'mimetic education' as part of a wider social pedagogy designed to form both boys and girls as social subjects ready for a certain station in life, see Michele Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

¹⁹ Chedgzoy, 'Make me a poet'.

²⁰ Edwin Haviland Miller, 'New Years Day Gift Books in the C16th', *Studies in Bibliography* 15, 1962, 233-41 (233).

extremely influential and fashionable mode of English Renaissance verse at the time when Paget was writing.²¹ At the same time as exploring the textual resources of the Petrarchan mode and the opportunities it provides the male subject for social and literary self-positioning, however, Paget recognises his obligations to protect his female relative and foster her interests, the latter being represented by the goal of a good marriage. Consequently, Petrarchan idealisation and objectification are entwined in these poems with a more familial emotional dynamic. This is reflected in the poems' structure: in each of them, the speaker praises the recipient's beauty and virtue in terms which owe a good deal to Petrarchan conventions, and then wishes her a long and happy life characterised by a contented and fertile marriage. The taking of these conventionally manly positions is of course inflected by the poet's youth, which means that his identification with them is aspirational and projective, rather than actual, while the status of the poems as literary and pedagogic exercises foregrounds the conventional nature of the Petrarchan tropes he employs even more sharply than usual. So, item 2 begins thus:

A glove I do present, in signe of mindfull mynd
 god graunt it may thie fingers fit, and hand in no place bynd
 no parfume I the[e] gaue, for that wer folie great
 thie handes alreadie are perfumed, more sweete than violet (f. 1v)

The gift of the glove provides the pretext for a blazoning of the female body here, though the tone is relatively uneroticised, alluding to a practical desire for comfort rather than sensuality. The invocation of the perfumed hand is entirely conventional, and serves to dematerialise the body, turning it into the scent of a flower associated with modesty, rather than to construct it as a fleshly object of desire. Flower imagery is also used in poem 3 to evoke the aristocratic girl's ideal combination of beauty and virtue:

thie roseall & carnation cheekes, which precious stones do passe
 do shew thy modest maidens mynd, which never stayned was (ll. 5-6)

²¹ It's impossible here to do more than gesture towards the extensive debate about the sexual politics of Petrarchan poetry. For a sampling of positions in the debate, see Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe 1540-1620*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990; **Barbara Estrin, Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne, and Marvell. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994; Catherine Bates, Masculinity, Gender and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007;

The celebration of the natural beauty of flowers as exceeding that of precious stones gives a particular emphasis to familiar Petrarchan tropes that is appropriate to the girl's youth, but may also have sexual undertones, given the popularity of images of plucking flowers as a way of referring to female sexual initiation in Renaissance texts. Indeed, the following line's insistence on the girl's maidenly purity highlights by contrast the potentially erotic flushing of the skin often evoked in Petrarchan discourse, playing on the ambiguity of the blush as a sign either of virtue or of unexpressed sexuality noted by Danielle Clarke.²²

The very notion of the blush as indicative of female virtue plays on the belief in a correspondence between interiority and outward appearance on which this entire poem is premised, as its opening lines make clear:

The face they say a picture is, of mynd wch lurkes wthin

If that be true then mynd of thin, no doubt is most devyne

Here, this trope foregrounds the transparent self-presence of the addressee, but such a correspondence is desired in the poem-writing gift-giver too, and poem 2 begins with the parallel claim that the gifted object is a 'signe of mindfull mynd' which embodies and betokens the giver's emotional and intellectual care for the giver. This claim recurs in many of William's poems, and is a key textual strategy by which they are positioned as not merely schoolroom exercises, but as part of the social texture of interactions in the household where they were produced and presented. William's verse also demonstrates an awareness that the giver's integrity should desirably be met by an ideal fit of interiority and exteriority in the recipient; in Item 3, for example, William celebrates such a correspondence of physical beauty and moral integrity in the recipient of his verse:

If then thou art in outward shew, most fair, for to behold

the virtues of thie mynd no doubt, do passe the purest gold (f.2r)

In this poem, it is not the gift itself, but the body of the recipient that discloses interiority. The requirement that the virtue of the girl's mind be transparently embodied is embedded in Renaissance gender ideologies, but also complicates the usual Petrarchan dynamic, in which the speaker exposes his love while the lady he addresses remains withholding and mysterious – in which, therefore, the man's physicality is more emotionally transparent than the

²² Danielle Clarke, 'The Iconography of the Blush: Marian Literature of the 1630s', in Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen, and Suzanne Trill, eds, *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Writing*. Keele: Keele University Press, 1996.

woman's. These lines are dense with culturally-charged meaning. Of crucial importance is the opening reference to common-sense cultural knowledge ('they say'), since a primary function of education in the Renaissance was precisely to induct children into the dominant cultural values expressed in commonplaces. The ubiquitous pedagogic practice of copying out *sententiae* was vital to the achievement of this goal, and is explicitly documented in Rachael Fane's notebooks. U269 F38/1/14, for instance, contains sententious rhyming couplets, some headed 'Sentences translated out of Catto into English', referring to the *Distichs of Cato*, an anonymous compilation (no longer attributed to Cato) of proverbial wisdom which was a key text of Latinate education throughout the Renaissance and beyond. The presence of translations from it in one of the Fane notebooks discussed below suggests that it might have been used by a male relative as well as by Rachael herself (although some girls did study Latin at this time, Rachael does not appear to have been one of them).²³ The ubiquity of the *Distichs of Cato* in the classrooms where boys were educated means that it is undoubtedly one of the sources underpinning the quasi-proverbial articulation of social values and expectations that forms much of the matter of William's poems, e.g.:

for basest things are left abroad, and Jewels of great price
 ar locked up in secret place, of them which would seme wise

Such lines manifest the aspiration to both possess and display competence in marshalling and deploying a particular mode of conventional knowledge. Given that the addressee of the poem is a young woman who, if not already of nubile age is anticipated to become so, locking up 'Jewels of great price' in a 'secret place' is not merely a matter of guarding material wealth, but articulates an ideology of female sexuality that had immense power in the lives of girls of William's class. It thus becomes evident that the idea of decorous conformity between inner and outer, physiognomy and emotion, and the concern to demonstrate appropriate interiority socially, are both implicitly gendered, and we can see Items 2 and 3 as very rich poems in terms of ideologies of female beauty and feminine behaviour. William's self-identification in these poems as a friend and kinsman seems to lay claim to a certain maturity and sense of responsibility relative to this female relative's marital and reproductive future. In its combination of Petrarchan objectification of female beauty with a projective identification with the 'pretie Impes' he envisages in the girl's future, this

²³ Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

sense of responsibility is one which enables William to use the composition of occasional verse as a stage on which to perform the masculinity being inculcated in him.

As this brief account indicates, the poems of William Paget constitute a rich archive for the exploration of children's positioning by and engagement with the Renaissance. By staging a youthful textual encounter with Renaissance literate and cultural values, and the ideologies of gender associated with them, they document how the exclusive, masculinist, elite culture critiqued by Kelly worked self-consciously to perpetuate itself in the way it educated its male children. If the poems discussed here show us a boy reproducing ideologies of gender through textual address to youthful female peers, they also disclose that the process of writing could be a complex cultural site where interactions between adults and children helped to prepare the latter for adulthood, and where the boy poet could achieve some social agency by using the act of writing to negotiate his place in the aristocratic household and manage his relationships with other inhabitants of it.

II

In this section, I turn away from the questions about gender and method prompted by a boy poet's address to and representation of a female peer, in order to examine the writings that Lady Rachael Fane produced between the ages of about ten and seventeen, recorded in a set of a dozen small notebooks produced in the 1620s by this aristocratic girl as she approached the transition from childhood to adulthood.²⁴ For girls of Rachael's social status marriage was socially constructed as the terminus of childhood, and some of her writing anticipates and reflects on the likely presence of marriage in her future. This corpus of material documents both the young Rachael Fane's responses to pedagogic exercises, and the creative uses she made of what she learned by doing them. Her manuscripts enable us to track some of the processes by which girlhood was formed in this family and to decipher the extent to which Renaissance values informed those processes. Rachael's early education was overseen by her grandmother Lady Grace Mildmay, whose life-writings document her own mid-

²⁴ Rachael Fane's manuscript writings are in Maidstone Library, Kent: U269 F38/1/1-15, U269 F38/2, U269 F38/3, U269 F38/4, U269 F38/5. Not all of the notebooks catalogued under U269 F38/1/1-15 are in Rachael's hand. For an account of her life, see Caroline M. K. Bowden, "Fane, Lady Rachael [*married names* Rachael Bourchier, countess of Bath; Rachael Cranfield, countess of Middlesex] (*bap.* 1613, *d.* 1680)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); online edition, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/93575>, accessed 29 January 2013.

sixteenth-century childhood and education and serve as an instance of the second category of memory-based textual inscriptions of childhood subjectivity.²⁵ I focus in particular on the retrospective account of her childhood which Grace composed towards the end of her long life and which she framed as a textual legacy to her daughter and subsequent female descendants, noting that she was moved by her own meditations on the spiritual and ethical imperatives of life to “set them downe vnto my daughter, &her children, as familiar talke & comunicacion with them, I being dead, as yf I were alieue.”²⁶

Juxtaposing the generically diverse textual traces of these two elite female childhoods enables us to explore the interactions of gender, generation, and cultural production over the key period associated with the Renaissance in England. It also makes it possible to reveal the limitations, at least as far as the English Renaissance is concerned, of Joan Kelly’s rather gloomy assumption that the extension of formal literacy to girls and women had negative consequences because it brought them under male cultural authority.²⁷ Over several generations, women in the Mildmay-Fane family set themselves to generate and transmit knowledge and texts in a female intellectual lineage that was oriented towards core Renaissance values. The Mildmay-Fane manuscripts constitute a counter-example to Sarah Gwyneth Ross’s insistence on the importance of father-daughter dynamics in enabling women to have a Renaissance.²⁸ Ross argues persuasively that for girls and women in the Renaissance, securing the possibility of “cultural engagement depended upon making the best use of ‘family’ networks” (12). She provides a wealth of examples to illustrate that in the majority of cases where girls gained access to formal learning and the possibility of active

²⁵ Since Lady Mildmay’s childhood is the focus, I will use her first name rather than her formal title in this discussion. For a biographical account and edited extracts from Mildmay’s copious manuscript writings, see Linda A. Pollock, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552-1620* (New York: St Martin’s, 1995). A briefer biography is Linda A. Pollock, “Mildmay, Grace, Lady Mildmay (c.1552–1620),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition, May 2010, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45817>, accessed 29 January 2013. An annotated transcript of about two-thirds of her autobiography has been published: Randall Martin, “The Autobiography of Grace, Lady Mildmay,” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 18:1 (1994), 33-81. The originals of Mildmay’s manuscripts are held in the Northamptonshire Studies Collection, Northampton Central Library. Citations here include both original pagination and that for Martin’s edition. Some subsequent quotations are cited in the text.

²⁶ Mildmay MS, 4; Martin, “Autobiography,” 42.

²⁷ Joan Kelly, “Did Women?” in *Women, History and Theory*, 35. [short title format after first citation]

²⁸ Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Subsequent page quotations cited in text.

literacy, this was because they were raised within an “intellectual family” (2) headed by a learned, patriarchal father who was supportive of female education, enabling them to appropriate for their own purposes the father-patron/daughter -client topos . . . associat[ed] with the learned daughters of the classical tradition” (11). In taking a male-dominated domain of formal learning seriously and training each other up in it, the Mildmay-Fane women formed a female-centered Renaissance household academy, to borrow Ross’s useful concept, in which a distinctive focus on medicine and piety accompanied forms of education and enculturation that were standard for girls of this class. But they also counterposed the classically-inflected father-daughter dyad with a more expansive model of vernacular pedagogic exchange between women. Both the father-daughter and the female-centered paradigms thus show that women and girls could indeed have a Renaissance on the terms in which Kelly and Ross both define it, and they help to expand our sense of what the cultural and intellectual empowerment associated with the Renaissance might mean in gendered terms.

If any woman did have a Renaissance, Lady Grace Mildmay did, and it was her childhood formation that prepared her to benefit from the empowerment associated with the new learning of the period. The combination of pious literacy, polished accomplishments, and magnanimous hospitality documented in her own manuscripts and in contemporary comment on her portrays her as an exemplary Renaissance female aristocrat, conforming to prescriptions for virtuous women while performing an appropriately feminized version of the *sprezzatura* desired in her male counterparts. She was accomplished in some of the secular skills deemed desirable in elite women, such as drawing, needlework, and musicianship; she also possessed in a high degree the technical skill of confectionery, which relates to her extensive and serious engagement with medical science.²⁹ Mistress Hamblyn, her childhood tutor, had “good knowledge in phisick & surgerie” (Mildmay MS, 10; Martin, “Autobiography,” 46) and introduced Grace to the serious study of herbals, setting her “to reade in Dr Turners Herball, & in Bartholomew Vigoe” (Mildmay MS, 11; Martin, “Autobiography,” 47). Thereby, Rebecca Laroche argues, her tutor opened to Grace a new Renaissance intellectual world of medical discourse in print, a public space of learning accessible to the literate rather than the domestic, female-dominated sphere of household medical practice, the knowledge of which was transmitted through shared labor, which

²⁹ Pollock, “Mildmay, Grace,” <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45817>.

women could more commonly access.³⁰ Mistress Hamblyn was responsible for Grace's education from the age of ten, and Grace's recollections of her childhood are primarily framed as a cross-generational narrative of her profound admiration and respect for this woman who shaped her:

She proued very religious, wyse, chaste, & all good vertues that might be in a woman were constantly settled in her, (for, from her youth she made good vse of all things that euer she did read, see, or heare; & obserued all companyes that euer she came in, good or badd: so that shee could giue a most right censure & true judgment of any things, & giue wyse counsell vpon any occasion (Mildmay MS, 9, Martin, "Autobiography," 46)

It is significant that Grace Mildmay sees Mistress Hamblyn's exemplary performance of virtuous Renaissance femininity as grounded in her own early learning, for she had been educated by Grace's mother, Lady Anne Sharington. The commitment to female learning in this family thus extends across generations and beyond lineal descent. As well as the scientific education she offered Grace, Hamblyn's pedagogic practice also focused more conventionally on moral training for virtuous womanhood in conformity with the prescriptions of influential educational theorists of the Renaissance such as Juan Luis Vives, whose publications on such matters coincided with Hamblyn's own education by Grace's mother.³¹ It therefore included a very high level of vernacular literacy, which Grace put to intensive use in reading the Bible and composing spiritual meditations. Weaving together these two strands of her education, the medical and the moral/biblical, in the corpus of over two thousand loose sheets of papers that she bequeathed to her daughter Mary, Grace left a textual legacy that witnesses to her expansion of the intellectual scope of the Renaissance elite woman.

And what did Rachael, Mary's daughter, who was educated by Grace, do with this legacy? She recorded a recipe for meringues which has brought her a certain modest celebrity in the world of twenty-first century food bloggers.³² (So much for progress narratives.) But that is not the whole story. The recipe for "Pets," the famous meringues, then a novelty in

³⁰ Rebecca Laroche, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts, 1550–1650*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.

³¹ Juan Luis Vives, *De institutione feminae christianae* [The Education of a Christian Woman] (London, 1524).

³² See, for instance, http://www.inmamaskitchen.com/FOOD_IS_ART/meringue2.html and <http://coreytazmania.weebly.com/1/post/2012/10/meringue.html>, both accessed 31 January 2013.

English cookery, actually suggests a level of culinary expertise approaching Grace Mildmay's excellence as a confectioner. It is recorded in Maidstone Library, Kent, manuscript U269 F38/2, identified by the catalogue entry as a "Recipe book compiled by Lady Rachael Fane . . . c. 1630," which was when she was about seventeen years old. The catalogued item is not quite a recipe book, however: it consists of one notebook, plus ten loose sheets containing recipes and medical instructions and a further sheet with a little meditative piece on it. The recipes in the notebook are all medicinal, variously curative and preventive, and include cures for shingles, bloodshot eyes, falling sickness, and rickets as well as "A Vomite for on much stuffed in y^e stomach," and "How to make a Glistier." The loose sheets include both medicinal and culinary recipes, many of them frequently found in similar manuscript compilations of the period, such as "To make sirrop of Lemons" and "A marche-paine tart." The commingling of medicinal, confectionery, and devotional writing in this notebook clearly reveals the influence of Lady Grace Mildmay, whose personal archive combined similar materials. And it documents a version of Renaissance womanhood that required the daughter of the elite to acquire multiple modes of cultural literacy.

The complexities of the ways in which these literacies bore on the possibility of cultural empowerment and liberation for the Renaissance aristocratic girl are richly documented in another of Rachael Fane's manuscripts (Maidstone Library, Kent U269 F38/1/5). This small notebook, its cover inscribed "R.F. January 29. 1626" (one day after Rachael's thirteenth birthday) in firm, clear print, contains a mixture of items that testify to the sometimes contradictory nature of the ideologies of femininity that shaped the early life of an aristocratic girl. It contains some religious writing reminiscent of Grace Mildmay's devotional practice, most notably a passage headed "meadetations upon y^e 50 psame" (11) as well as a sermon note (10). Note-taking as a means of shaping and recording the girl's engagement with sermons and meditating on the psalms were both key forms of intellectual and spiritual discipline that loomed large in the education of Protestant girls and women; their influence is pervasively evident in Grace Mildmay's manuscript writings as well as in this notebook.³³

But these much-incited textual practices are juxtaposed in the notebook with very different, secular material, namely passages in French accompanied by Rachael's translations

³³ For an overview of these pedagogic practices, see Kate Chedzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place and History* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 25-27.

of them into English.³⁴ Most of these passages (setting aside a brief devotional excerpt on pages 2-3) are drawn from the ninth book of *Amadis de Gaul*, for example, “Lettre du Prince Anaxartes A L’infante Oriane” (6-7). *Amadis de Gaul* and its derivatives were favorites among the chivalric prose romances that provided popular reading matter for the young throughout the Renaissance, along with English fictions such as Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, of which twelve-year-old Mary Rich had a copy in her personal library a decade after Rachael Fane compiled her notebooks.³⁵ Noting the “suspect” nature of the material from *Amadis de Gaul*, Nandini Das questions whether it would have been deemed a suitable translation assignment by a tutor and suggests that rather than constituting a pedagogic task, it may, along with the masque I discuss below, represent “another of [Rachael’s] voluntary youthful forays into the world of fiction.”³⁶ What the translation exercises share with the masque is an exploration of romance tropes as a way of negotiating the expectations of heterosexual courtship and marriage that would shape Rachael’s life in the coming years as she made the transition from girlhood to adulthood.

Rachael’s active use in her writing of such tropes to consider the meanings of the end of childhood is illuminated by comparison with Elizabeth Brackley’s work two decades later, in collaboration with her sister Jane Cavendish, on the play *The Concealed Fancies*, which plays with the materials of romance, and the “Pastorall” masque.³⁷ Several scholars have identified the enabling influence of William Cavendish on his daughters’ writing, and to that extent Cavendish family culture conforms to Sarah Gwyneth Ross’s model of the patriarchally-directed household academy.³⁸ But the textual collaboration between sisters counterposes paternal influence with a feminine co-creative effort that echoes the culture of female textual interaction found in the Mildmay-Fane family. William Cavendish may have

³⁴ On the role of French in the education of girls in early modern England, see Jerome de Groot, “‘Euery one teacheth after thyr owne fantasie’: French Language Instruction,” in *Performing Pedagogy in Early Modern England: Gender, Instruction and Performance*, ed. Kate Moncrief and Kate McPherson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011, 84-107.

³⁵ Edel Lamb, “The Literature of Early Modern Childhoods,” *Literature Compass*, 7 (2010), 412–23 (esp. 413). Ramona Wray, “Recovering the Reading of Renaissance Englishwomen: Deployments of Autobiography,” *Critical Survey* 12.2 (2000): 33–48 (esp. 35).

³⁶ Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction, 1570-1620*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, 157.

³⁷ “Poems Songs a Pastorall and a Play by the Right Honorable the Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley,” Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson poet. 16.

³⁸ Margaret J. M. Ezell, “‘To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen’: The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 51 (1988), 281-96.

educated his daughters for authorship, but it was during his prolonged absence from the household that they produced their substantial original writings. Elizabeth had been married in 1641 at the age of fifteen to John Egerton, Viscount Brackley and Earl of Bridgewater, but remained at the Cavendish family home for several years thereafter because she was considered, as her step-mother Margaret Cavendish would later put it, “too young to be bedded”; Alison Findlay suggests that in the “Pastorall” Elizabeth wrote for herself the role of Chastity, a “shee Priest” [who] remains icily chaste even though she is married.³⁹ Elizabeth’s experience of marriage and textual reflections on it illustrate the complexities associated with identifying the end of childhood for aristocratic girls in the Renaissance. The part played in such girls’ lives by dynastically-motivated marriages as the terminus of childhood makes plain that the liberations offered by the Renaissance could at best be no more than partial and compromised for them.

The particular significance that the narratives, tropes, and values embedded in romance might have for girls such as Brackley, Rich, or Fane is signaled in Fane’s notebook by an English passage evidently drawn from a romance narrative in the same mode as the extracts from *Amadis* (F38/1/5, 8-9), followed by its translation into French (F38/1/5, 9-10). The passage begins “Ther is nothing in this world of more greater danger to ceepe, yⁿ A yong woman or made y^t Loue has struke w^{it} his golden dart, here is asartaine excampell” (F38/1/5, 8). The vulnerability of young women to the “golden dart” of love and the likely disruptive consequences of them being so struck are tropes that recur frequently in secular romance fiction. They contribute to a cultural perception of girls as emotionally labile and in need of discipline and constraint to ensure that their seduction into adult heterosexuality does not make them exceed the bounds of parental moderation.⁴⁰ The “golden dart” is Cupid’s weapon, and Rachael’s engagement with the Cupid of romance narrative via this translation exercise appears to have been an influence on her original writings for performance, which are recorded in Maidstone Library MS U269/F38/3. In particular, the figure of Cupid is prominent in the “May masque,” which employs attributes of the masque form—a large cast of characters, songs and dances, and direct address to a familiar audience—to create a familial entertainment in which five siblings, a cousin, and three other

³⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of William Cavendish*, cited in Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Both quotations are found on p. 108.

⁴⁰ Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

child members of the household, ranging in age from four to twelve years, can all participate.⁴¹

Rachael's masque uses Cupid and his mother Venus to explore the role of sexuality and marriage in the transition from girlhood to adulthood. The dramatic action acknowledges the disruptive and potentially risky effects Cupid's arrow could have in young women's lives but draws back from heterosexual romance by recasting the mischievous boy Cupid as a virtuous child submitting to his mother's authority and superior understanding:

Cupite I am com for to accord
 To what my mother has done
 For yt I know
 Her wisdom is soe
 Yt she cane more good

Yn I unto ye shew (Maidstone Library MS U269/F38/3, f. 3v)

Fane takes up the dynamic of female instruction and pedagogic authority that characterized her own family culture and education, transforming it so that the adolescent boy acknowledges and submits to maternal wisdom. Staging an assertion of maternal authority over sons, otherwise scarcely seen in Renaissance literature beyond the pages of the mother's legacy genre, Fane inverts the father-daughter dyad that structures Sarah Ross's claim that women were able to access the cultural benefits of the Renaissance.

In her May masque, Rachael Fane makes unique use of the figure of Cupid to articulate the distinctive perspective on heterosexual seduction of a young girl who repudiates romance in the present, but knows both that marriage will be in her future, and that – given the dynastic importance of her marriage – it is likely that she will have little if any agency in determining who and when she marries. To this extent, her work echoes the assumption made in William Paget's gift poems for his young female relatives, that a girl's future adult life is always already mapped out for her by the expectation of marriage and procreation. This is illustrated in a sequence of the masque which centres on the presentation of offerings of symbolic gifts including 'birds beasts flouers' and fruits to important audience members,

⁴¹ This masque is the most accessible of Rachael's writings, having been edited by Marion O'Connor, "Rachael Fane's May Masque at Apethorpe 1627," *English Literary Renaissance*, 36:1 (2006): 90-113. For a reading of it which complements the analysis offered here, see my "Playing with Cupid: Gender, Sexuality, and Adolescence," in Diana Henderson, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares 3*. London: Routledge, 2007, 138-57.

the offering of a gift to Rachael's sister-in-law Grace Lady Despenser draws attention to her pregnancy, and in particular to the unborn child whose presence is transforming the recently-married young woman's body into a maternal one:

to her great bely

male or female shouse yo whether

Heres a gift to yo if nether. (f. 2v)

Affectionately addressing a pregnant woman only a few years older than her, Rachael here has the jester – the masque's master of ceremonies – playfully register the shaping significance of gender in any child's life. Across the various genres she works with, then, Rachael's writings both recognise the force of the expectations of heterosexual courtship and marriage that will shape her transition from girlhood to adult life as a member of the Renaissance elite, and create a textual space where she as a girl on the threshold of adulthood can, at least in play, articulate a critical perspective on them. This masque shares with the translation exercises discussed above a commitment to exploring romance tropes as a way of negotiating these expectations. Rachael's active use in her writing of such tropes to consider the meanings of the end of childhood is illuminated by comparison with the similarly-aged Elizabeth Brackley's work two decades later, in collaboration with her sister Jane Cavendish, on the play *The Concealed Fancies*, which plays with the materials of romance, and the 'Pastorall' masque.⁴² Several scholars have identified the enabling influence of William Cavendish on his daughters' writing, and to that extent Cavendish family culture conforms to Sarah Gwyneth Ross's model of the patriarchally-directed household academy.⁴³ But the textual collaboration between sisters counterposes paternal influence with a feminine co-creative effort that echoes the culture of female textual interaction found in the Mildmay-Fane family: William Cavendish may have educated his daughters for authorship, but it was during his prolonged absence from the household that they produced their substantial original writings. Elizabeth had been married in 1641 at the age of fifteen to John Egerton, Viscount Brackley and Earl of Bridgewater, but remained at the Cavendish family home for several years thereafter because she was considered, as her step-mother Margaret Cavendish

⁴² 'Poems Songs a Pastorall and a Play by the Right Honorable the Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley', Bodleian MS Rawlinson poet. 16.

⁴³ Margaret J.M. Ezell, "To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen: The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 51, 1988, 281-96.

would later put it, ‘too young to be bedded’.⁴⁴ Alison Findlay suggests that Elizabeth wrote for herself the role of Chastity in the ‘Pastorall’, ‘a “shee Priest” [who] remains icily chaste even though she is married (ibid.). Elizabeth’s experience of marriage and textual reflections on it illustrate the complexities associated with identifying the end of childhood for aristocratic girls in the Renaissance. The part played in such girls’ lives by dynastically-motivated marriages as the terminus of childhood makes plain that the liberations offered by the Renaissance could at best be no more than partial and compromised for them. For Rachael Fane, as for many of the other elite girls who came to literacy during the English Renaissance, a familial context that promoted girls’ education and cultural engagement was crucial in allowing her to access some of the empowerment associated with traditional narratives of the Renaissance. But her upbringing within the context of a feminized “household academy” did not, as far as we know, enable her to establish, in adult life, a “household salon,”⁴⁵ which would have been characterized by intellectual collaboration between husband and wife. Account books reveal that Rachael bought books and musical instruments and paid to have her portrait painted by Anthony Van Dyck, but no surviving evidence testifies to her own creative or intellectual production in adult life.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The remarkable childhood archives left by William Paget and Rachael Fane proffer the scholarly temptation to associate that period of productivity in early life with the trope of childhood as itself a golden age, like the Renaissance, that cannot but be lost. Across the various genres they worked with, the writings of both these young people recognize the force of the expectations that will shape their adult lives as members of the Renaissance elite; but they also create textual spaces where these children looking ahead to adulthood can, at least in play, articulate a critical perspective on those expectations. How do these writings enable us to determine whether children had a Renaissance?

Both William Paget’s verse and Rachael Fane’s notebooks testify to the ways in which the Renaissance humanist curriculum and pedagogic imaginary were realized in the practice of textual composition. They directly illuminate elite children’s encounters with the

⁴⁴ Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of William Cavendish*, cited in Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 108.

⁴⁵ Ross, *Birth of Feminism*, 8 and 13.

⁴⁶ Pollock, “Mildmay, Grace,” <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45817>.

cultural and ideological formations that were definitional of the Renaissance as a period concept. By showing children engaging directly with the forms, genres, conventions, and compositional practices that characterized Renaissance literary culture, these child-authored texts constitute a unique witness to children's engagement with both a complex and self-conscious literary culture and the social complexities of the aristocratic world they would grow up to enter. They offer a concrete illustration of the way that humanist education formed children as readers and writers, illuminating how it might prepare them both for authorship, and for an adult place in society.

Emerging as they do out of complex social situations in which there were no clear boundaries between the social worlds of children and of adults, the writings of Paget and Fane also reveal the importance of cross-generational interactions. Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan note that children's agency is constrained just as that of adults is, and that both children's experiences of childhood, and their 'capacity to reflect on, and shape, their own experience' are profoundly affected by historical and cultural influences.⁴⁷ Neither the poems of William Paget nor the dramatic texts scripted (and, I surmise from some production notes recorded on a loose sheet tucked into U269 F38/3, probably also directed) by Rachael Fane constitute textual sites where a child's voice can be heard in an unproblematically direct and unmediated way; and only in a very limited sense could these writings be seen as representative of childhood in the Renaissance more generally. Those of William's poems I discuss in the present essay are addressed to a young girl of his own generation, but most of them were written for adults, under the tutelage of an adult who not only trained William in the craft of writing verse but also transcribed and preserved those verses for his own purposes. Given the immense importance of performance and rhetorical skills in the Renaissance curriculum, William's poems would likely have been presented to their recipients not in written form but by being recited aloud by him;⁴⁸ the original audience for them, I suspect, would have been a mixed one of both adults and children at a festive family occasion. Similarly, though Rachael's masques were scripted by her in her early teens and performed by a group of children aged between about four and fourteen, they reveal a

⁴⁷ Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan, eds, *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Approaches*. London: Sage, 2005, Preface, pp. xi-xiii (p. xii).

⁴⁸ Ursula Potter, 'Performing Arts in the Tudor Classroom', in Lloyd Edward Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine Van Elk, eds, *Tudor Drama before Shakespeare, 1485-1590*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp.

sophisticated knowledge of adult literary and dramatic culture, address mixed-age audiences, and employ a dramatic mode highly characteristic of her late-Renaissance moment in which the dividing lines between performers and audience, adults and children, are frequently traversed. Her masques, like Paget's verse, do not disclose an unmediated child subjectivity. Rather, these writings reveal the porosity of the worlds of adults and children to each other as far as the cultural practices of the Renaissance elite are concerned.

William Paget and Rachael Fane benefited from a mode of formal, literate education that was characteristic of the humanist pedagogy of the Renaissance. As a result of their acquisition of a literacy that was more than merely functional, they were able to produce bodies of writing that reveal a familiarity with, and a certain competence in manipulating, the characteristic tropes and genres of two literary forms closely associated with the English Renaissance. Paget composed occasional verse that owes debts both to the Petrarchan poetic mode and to the championing of English vernacular form by Tudor poets like George Turberville. Some of Rachael Fane's MSS enable us to see Renaissance pedagogy in action: as far as her more literary output is concerned, her dramatic scripts show her both working in one of the most highly valued modes of her class, the court masque, and doing so in a way that is indebted to the Renaissance's high valuation of imitative, intertextual writing. In these ways, then, Paget and Fane certainly participated in the literary culture of the Renaissance. But is saying that much tantamount to saying that they benefited from the opportunities traditionally associated with the Renaissance as a cultural concept? And to what extent would making such a claim about these two aristocratic children entitle us to generalise more broadly that children as a social group had a Renaissance? These aristocratic children are not, of course, representative of children as a whole, any more than the elite women studied by Kelly were typical of all women. The fact of their literacy, the circumstances in which they acquired it, the opportunities they had to undertake literary composition, and the material conditions which enabled the preservation of the work they wrote, all set them apart from the vast majority of children, male and female, even as they body forth the importance of the diffusion of literate culture as a key attribute of the Renaissance. Indeed, the very existence of their writing, as well as the nature of its form and content, make plain to what extent the Renaissance was an elite phenomenon. My research into children's writings produced in early modern Britain shows that as the period goes on, the extension of literacy associated with the Renaissance enabled children from a wider spectrum of society to come to writing;

but it is only the writing of elite children that engages with those literary forms that are seen as characteristic of the cultural values we associate with ‘the Renaissance’ as a period concept. Any attempt to answer the question of whether Paget and Fane benefited from the wider cultural empowerment which Kelly saw as an attribute of the Renaissance, traditionally conceived, must also be over-determined by their privileged social status. The assumption that access to education and literacy is empowering for children is deeply embedded in Western society, and may well originate in the Renaissance commitment to literacy as a social good.

Certainly, access to writing appears to have enabled these children to reflect and comment on the particular circumstances of their lives, and those of other children in their community, and gave them a platform for entering into cultural exchange with adults. The writings of William Paget and Rachael Fane thus constitute textual sites where we can see both how literate education enabled the values of the Renaissance to be reproduced and children inducted into their place in the cultural elite, and how those children might be able to turn literacy to their own ends. Acknowledging that the reading, writing and circulation of texts in the early modern period could be a site of interaction between adults and children makes it possible to negotiate the child’s status on one hand as subject of his or her own life and on the other as object of adult investments, fantasies, and projects; to create ways in which scholarship can both honour children as subjects and agents, and reflect on the historical constraints and limitations of both of those things. To that extent, then, it seems that the particular texts I have examined here might make it possible to offer a more positive – albeit still highly qualified – answer to Kelly’s question as it bears on children than she was prepared to venture for women.

But perhaps one of the ways in which the impact of Kelly’s work is most evident, however, is that it no longer seems at all clear that a single, confident answer to her question would be at all feasible or desirable as far as children are concerned. Kelly’s work crucially disrupted that previously taken-for-granted optimistic account of the Renaissance, proffering instead a more uneven and complex narrative of historical change. When I ask whether children had a Renaissance, I do so with an awareness of all the exclusions and inequities attendant on that concept, and in order to critique it further rather than to reaffirm it.